



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY

TITLE IX COMPLIANCE REVIEW

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

Department of Physics Graduate Program

March 2014

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Department of Physics Graduate Program

TITLE IX COMPLIANCE REVIEW REPORT

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TITLE IX COMPLIANCE REVIEW REPORT

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Department of Physics Graduate Program

I. Introduction

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) of the United States Department of Energy (DOE or the Department), conducted a Title IX compliance review of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VT), Department of Physics graduate program for the academic years 2007-2008 through 2011-2012. The compliance review was conducted pursuant to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), as amended, 20 U.S.C. Section 1681, *et seq.*, and DOE's implementing regulations at 10 C.F.R. Parts 1040 and 1042. The report of findings is based on a review of records and other data provided by the University, information obtained from the University's website, and information obtained through interviews of students, faculty, and administrators of the Department of Physics graduate program, the Director for Compliance and Conflict Resolution, and other University administrative officials.

A. Background

DOE supports a diverse portfolio of research at colleges, universities, and research institutions across the United States, providing funding to more than 300 such institutions every year. The funding provided by DOE for research at universities and colleges supports thousands of principal investigators, graduate students, and post-doctoral researchers. DOE provided over \$13 million in financial assistance to VT's Department of Physics graduate program during the period under review.

Title IX and DOE Title IX implementing regulations prohibit recipients of federal financial assistance, such as universities and colleges, from discriminating on the basis of sex in any of their educational programs or activities. 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a); 10 C.F.R. § 1042.100. In addition, DOE Title IX implementing regulations require the Department to periodically conduct compliance reviews of recipients of DOE financial assistance to ensure compliance with the nondiscrimination requirements of Title IX. *See* 10 C.F.R. §§ 1042.605, 1040.101(a).

In July 2004, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report (GAO-04-639) entitled, "GENDER ISSUES: Women's Participation in the Sciences has Increased, but Agencies Need to do More to Ensure Compliance with Title IX." The purpose of the report was two-fold: (1) to report on the status of women in the sciences; and (2) to evaluate the Title IX compliance activities of the four federal science agencies—the Department of Energy, Department of Education, National Aeronautics and Space

Administration, and National Science Foundation. With respect to the status of women in the sciences, the GAO reported that the participation of women in the sciences at the undergraduate and graduate levels had increased over the past 30 years; however, the GAO reported that “[w]omen continue to major in the sciences and earn degrees in the sciences to a lesser extent than men.” The GAO also noted that some studies suggest that sex discrimination may still affect women’s choices and professional progress in the sciences. With respect to the Title IX compliance activities of the four federal science agencies, the GAO found that the agencies had taken steps, through the conduct of complaint investigations and the provision of technical assistance, to ensure that the institutions to which they provide financial assistance are in compliance with Title IX. However, the GAO noted that “[g]iven the general lack of knowledge and familiarity with the reach of Title IX and the disincentives for filing complaints against superiors,” the agencies needed to do more to judge whether sex discrimination exists in the sciences. To that end, the GAO made recommendations specific to each of the four federal science agencies. With respect to the Department, the GAO recommended that the Secretary of Energy ensure that compliance reviews of grantees are periodically conducted.

In August 2007, Congress passed, and the President signed into law, the America COMPETES Act, Pub. L. No. 110-69, § 5010, 121 Stat. 572, 620 (2007), which provided additional impetus for the Department to conduct compliance reviews. The Act states that the Department should: (1) implement the recommendations contained in the GAO report; and (2) conduct at least two Title IX compliance reviews annually of recipients of DOE financial assistance.

B. Objective

The objective of the Title IX compliance review at VT was three-fold: (1) to determine whether male and female applicants and students had equal access to the opportunities and benefits offered by the Department of Physics graduate program; (2) to determine whether the University’s graduate Physics Department was in compliance with the requirements of Title IX and DOE Title IX implementing regulations; and (3) to identify and report on any promising practices instituted by the University for promoting equity among male and female students and applicants.

C. Scope

The review included a review of VT’s Department of Physics graduate program for the academic years 2007 through 2012. To determine whether graduate applicants and students, regardless of their sex, had equal access to opportunities and benefits offered, the OCR evaluated the following areas and/or practices of the Department of Physics graduate program: (1) student enrollment; (2) recruitment and outreach efforts; (3) admissions policies; (4) leave of absence and re-admission policies; (5) financial assistance opportunities; (6) graduate examination and writing requirements; (7) the academic climate; and (8) student safety. To determine whether the University was in compliance with the requirements of Title IX and DOE Title IX implementing

regulations, the OCR evaluated the following: (1) whether the University has designated a Title IX Coordinator; (2) whether the University has taken continuing steps to notify the campus community about its nondiscrimination policies related to Title IX; and (3) whether the University has adopted and published grievance procedures providing for the prompt and equitable resolution of Title IX-related complaints, including sex discrimination and sexual harassment complaints.

II. VT's Department of Physics Graduate Program

A. Student Enrollment

At the time of the review, VT's Department of Physics had 71 students enrolled in its master of science (M.S.) and doctoral (Ph.D.) degree programs. Of those students, 54 (76%) were male and 17 (24%) were female. Approximately 30 students were interviewed as a part of the review process.

Table 1a below shows the enrollment of students, by gender in the M.S. and Ph.D. programs for years 2007-2008 through 2011-2012.

Table 1a: Graduate Physics Student Enrollment (includes MS and PhD students)

Academic Year	Total Enrolled	Male	% Male	Female	% Female
2007-2008	71	52	73	19	27
2008-2009	67	55	82	12	18
2009-2010	66	51	77	15	23
2010-2011	74	56	76	18	24
2011-2012	71	54	76	17	24

B. Faculty

At the time of the review, VT's Department of Physics graduate programs had approximately 27 faculty members (23 males and 4 females) within its graduate programs. Fifteen faculty members (3 females and 12 males) were interviewed as a part of the review. Several administrators and the department Chair were also interviewed.

III. Outreach and Recruiting

DOE Title IX implementing regulations prohibit recipients of financial assistance from discriminating on the basis of sex in the recruitment of students. 10 C.F.R. § 1042.310. To determine whether the Department of Physics graduate programs were in compliance with this provision, the OCR reviewed their recruitment and outreach activities.

A. Recruitment and Outreach Events and Activities

Similar to many other universities, VT engages in a variety of marketing, recruiting, and outreach events and activities to attract students to its graduate programs. Much of its recruiting for the physics graduate programs is done via the physics graduate program webpage, which highlights various aspects of the programs offered. The University also utilizes a variety of printed materials, advertising via the Internet, and contact with student organizations to attract students to its physics graduate programs.

In its response to DOE's data requests, the University stated that the Department of Physics performs no outreach and recruitment efforts separate from those performed by the Graduate College. However, DOE discovered a host of outreach activities performed by the physics department, as well as some outreach activities which may be conducted in conjunction with the Graduate School. DOE found a great amount of outreach efforts aimed at the K-12 population in the area of physics and other STEM areas (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). DOE has highlighted some of VT's outreach efforts below.

1. K-12 Outreach Efforts

a. VT-STEM

One of the University's outreach programs is VT-STEM, which is focused on building networks within the University and across K-12 communities to enhance the effectiveness of integrated STEM education resulting in improved scientific and technological literacy and the competitiveness of Virginia's students. According to the University, the mission of VT-STEM is to share research and resources among the University, public education, and other partners that will contribute to Virginia's leadership in K-12 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through: (1) serving as a bridge between the K-12 community and the University; (2) partnering with the K-12 community to prepare students and faculty to participate in outreach efforts; (3) facilitating quality K-12 STEM education experiences; and (4) collaborating with the K-12 community to enhance teacher preparation and professional development.

As a part of the VT-STEM outreach program, VT hosts a one-week art, science, and technology camp for students ages 7-15. Students are given an in-depth, hands-on instruction in the arts, science, and technology, and also get to experience dorm life on a college campus.

b. C-Tech² (Computers and Technology at Virginia Tech)

Computers and Technology at Virginia Tech is a two week summer camp for high school women from Virginia. The purpose of the program is to introduce the participants to engineering and related technologies through various hands-on activities, laboratories and presentations. A primary focus of the program is to help develop and sustain the interests of women in engineering and the sciences. The program allows participants to explore

applications of engineering, math, and science in a way that is fun and exciting. Participants spend the majority of their time involved in hands-on activities designed to increase interest in and knowledge of applications of engineering, math, and science to real world situations. The target population for the program is junior and senior high school girls.

c. College Bound

College Bound is a college transition program designed for high school juniors, seniors, and their parents. The three day program promotes self-advocacy skills for college, explores assistive technologies, and allows participants an opportunity to participate in an actual college class, develop organizational strategies, explore study skills, discover campus services and activities learn from successful college student leaders, and understand the college accommodation process.

d. F.A.S.T. (Females Advancing Science & Technology)

F.A.S.T. is a one day conference for 650+ sixth grade girls to introduce to STEM, motivate them, and encourage them to seek careers in STEM.

e. FIRST Robotics

FIRST Robotics is a partnership between Virginia Tech and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) FIRST robotics high school team, which includes undergraduates from a two-semester mechanical engineering senior capstone design course, and a pilot mechanical engineering technical elective. The FIRST robotics program at MCPS was developed nine years ago to facilitate STEM literacy by creating experiences to promote self-efficacy of high school students in STEM areas. The MCPS program was set up in the context of a two-semester robotics course that high-school students take for credit. This FIRST program at MCPS was developed using approaches which are based on psychologist Albert Bandura's four sources of efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and stress reduction. In this manner, high school students achieve a level of familiarity and literacy in engineering and other STEM topics, such as design and manufacturing, in the context of robotics. VT engineering capstone design students working with the high school students are taught mentoring and leadership skills in order to effectively interact and promote self-efficacy with the high-school students. Through their experiences of mentoring, the VT students also achieve an additional level of their own self-efficacy with technical subjects, and an understanding of how to facilitate STEM learning and literacy in others. This approach is also preparing engineering undergraduates for success in professional practice as well as facilitating future successful outreach and mentoring strategies for these students to further technological literacy in future generations.

f. Imagination

Imagination is a one week summer camp for middle school students from the New River and Roanoke Valley areas. Targeted at under-represented students, they come to Virginia Tech daily to participate in hands-on activities such as toothpick bridge building, egg drop contests, and robot programming. The students also learn about the college admission process and learn about various fields of engineering through, for example, tours of the wind tunnel and the rainfall simulator. The goal of this program is to heighten their interest in pursuing technical degrees.

g. Inside Architecture + Design

Inside Architecture + Design is a program designed for high school students interested in architecture or design. Students gain hands-on experience with long time educators and practitioners.

h. Kids' Tech University

The purpose of KTU is to spark the interest of children ages 8-12 to learn the STEM disciplines and to become acquainted with the University setting. 250+ children are invited from the geographical area surrounding Virginia Tech, including the cities of Roanoke, Salem and Radford, and the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski and Roanoke to participate in KTU. The KTU curriculum includes two parts: (1) lectures given by world-renowned researchers in Virginia Tech lecture halls; and (2) a Virtual Kids Tech University (VKTU), which includes a kids' forum and interactive virtual labs. The lectures are based on answering "Why" questions, such as "Why are there animals with spotted bodies and striped tails, but no animal with a striped body and a spotted tail?" or "Why are computer programs so frustrating?" First, the lectures will capture the participants' attention in a given STEM subject, and then VKTU will follow up with virtual labs and materials that channel the participants' energy into further exploration of the disciplines. VT creates the "University feel" by hosting the lectures in a Virginia Tech lecture hall, sponsoring lunches for each child, either at the student dining hall or box lunches, providing KTU identification cards, and giving campus tours of Virginia Tech.

i. MCPS/VT Robotic Collaborative

The Montgomery County Public Schools and VT's robotics collaborative involves high school students, University students from engineering and related fields, and public school and University faculty. Together they explore math, science, and engineering principles using the field of robotics. This program is an educational collaboration between Montgomery County Public Schools, and VT's School of Education and the College of Engineering. It brings together high school students, University students from engineering, and public school and University faculty. Collaboratively, they investigate the math, science, and engineering principles behind the design and fabrication of a semi-autonomous robot to be entered in an international competition. Over the course of one school year, the field of robotics is explored as a real-world discipline in which the

fundamentals learned during one's secondary education are put to a practical use. Using the applied skills, various robot prototypes are constructed throughout the semester, as well as a 120 pound robot designed to execute tasks critical to winning the FIRST Robotics Competition. FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) seeks to inspire in high school students both an interest in math, science, and technology, and a lasting desire to effect positive change in their world. Mentorship is a key component of this robotics collaborative. Undergraduate and graduate students from the University take a mentorship course collaboratively taught by instructors in Science Education and Mechanical Engineering, which supports these students in acquiring the skills necessary for motivating and facilitating problem solving experiences for the students. The high school students work in inquiry groups facilitated by the mentors using the engineering design process so that they can consider and explain problems, and develop strategies that can be developed into a plan, implemented and tested. High school students obtain an elective credit for their participation in the course and the college students enrolled in the mentorship course earn an elective credit in their disciplines.

j. Student Transition Engineering Program (STEP)

STEP is a five-week orientation program for new students entering the College of Engineering. Participants engage in an intensive academic program during the summer. One of the program's goals is to help ease the transition from high school to VT, and ensure that students know the keys to academic success.

k. Upward Bound

Upward Bound provides preparation and tutoring in English, mathematics, science, foreign language, SAT prep, ACT prep, study and test-taking skills, career planning, time management, communication skills, problem solving, and more to low income, under-represented, and/or first generation college-bound students. Upward Bound also helps students research and choose colleges and universities and apply for financial aid.

l. VT Summer Training Academy for Rising Students

VT Summer Training Academy for Rising Students provides informal learning experiences in science and technology for low income, under-represented, and/or first-generation college bound at-promise youth.

m. VBI High School Summer Internship

Virginia Bioinformatics Institute (VBI) offers a high school summer internship to expose students to the fields of research in biology, plant pathology, the environment, climate and bioinformatics. This week-long program consists of several research activity labs, research-related tours, and a discussion/lecture series. The main objective of this high school internship is to show students the fun and excitement of scientific research.

Students have the opportunity to explore the world of genomics and the environment with world-renowned research scientists in professional labs.

n. Other Outreach Efforts

In addition to the activities listed above, VT's Department of Physics website indicates that graduate students and faculty visit K-12 institutions several times a week, performing demonstrations and engaging young students in physics-related conversation. The website also contains a plethora of links to websites that provide information on demonstrations, lectures, classes, etc., which are hosted by VT and other higher educational institutions around the nation. Interested individuals can watch demonstrations online, read about STEM related subjects, and register for activities.

2. Informal Educational Groups

In addition to the K-12 outreach efforts listed above, VT also collaborates with several informal educational groups such as youth groups, 4-H, and scouts, as well as adult groups such as Master Naturalists and AmeriCorps, and libraries, galleries, museums, parks, etc. VT's website explains that informal environments encourage experiential and social learning, and are ideal complements to formal efforts in STEM education. The affective side of STEM--whether people will "like" these fields enough to become familiar with them, let alone to spend the time and effort to develop expertise--depends upon engagement and interest. These are enhanced by social interactions around STEM topics, and by direct personal experiences with STEM activities. Informal education can provide relevant, experiential education along with a framework for individuals, families, and groups of all ages to explore the STEM fields and their importance to society.

VT also houses the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), which provides both adult and youth education. VCE's 4-H is a widely respected youth development program that has taken a national focus on Science, Engineering and Technology education. VT's Museum of Geosciences is a charter member of VT-STEM, providing programs, workshops, and support for teachers and the community. In 2011, a partnership between VT and the Science Museum of Western Virginia was established to help promote STEM literacy and understanding through informal educational efforts.

3. Public Outreach

The Department of Physics website indicates that it hosts several events which are aimed at connecting the audience with physics, and are open to all age groups. For example, the physics department hosts an annual family-friendly physics outreach event in Northern Virginia called "Fun With Physics." The department also hosts piano tuning demonstrations and open houses at an observatory. In addition, although it is currently suspended while awaiting a new sponsor, VT's Department of Physics hosted events at a local restaurant called, "Café Scientifique," in which a variety of science topics for the general public were discussed. Finally, several of the students who were interviewed as part of the review stated that they were aware of open houses held by the department.

4. Tracking Outreach and Recruitment Efforts

The University does not track the number of male and female students who participate in its outreach and recruitment activities, and who ultimately apply to the Department of Physics graduate programs. However, DOE's review discovered that several of the students interviewed as a part of the review attended a VT outreach program when they were in junior and senior high school.

B. Recruitment Incentives

According to the University, the Department of Physics graduate programs do not offer incentives, such as a sign-on bonus, as a means of attracting prospective students.

Promising Practices

VT's Department of Physics and the Graduate School have extensive outreach efforts that reach far down the pipeline into the K-12 audience to attract younger students to STEM fields of study and careers. Not only are there a vast array of K-12 outreach programs which are hosted and/or developed by the physics department and the Graduate School, but the programs are delivered through a variety of means, making them accessible to a large audience. VT students and faculty make themselves visible in communities surrounding VT by going to schools, restaurants, and an observatory; VT holds camps, classes, and lectures at its facilities; and the department also posts a litany of lectures and demonstrations that are accessible online through its website. We find VT's Department of Physics and the Graduate School's outreach and recruitment efforts geared toward the K-12 audience have been more extensive than most of the other universities reviewed by OCR thus far, and commend the University's efforts. OCR considers such efforts to attract both male and female students to its graduate physics programs as promising practices that could be used as a model for other universities to follow.

Although the University participates in a variety of outreach and recruiting events and activities, most of the students interviewed stated that they were not specifically recruited by the University. Most of the students interviewed stated that they were attracted to the University's Department of Physics graduate programs because of the University's and/or department's reputation, areas of research, locale, or professors. However, as noted above, a few students stated that they had participated in at least one recruitment/outreach activity sponsored by the University and/or the physics department.

Finding

The review revealed no evidence of discrimination on the basis of sex in VT's Graduate College and Department of Physics recruitment and outreach efforts, activities, and events. DOE finds that VT's Graduate College and Department of Physics are in compliance with Title IX and DOE's implementing regulations.

Recommendation

DOE recommends tracking whether students who have applied for admission to VT's graduate physics program have attended an outreach or recruiting activity in order to determine which efforts are the most successful at attracting potential students.

IV. Admissions

A. The Admissions Process

Application to the Department of Physics graduate programs are usually made online. In response to DOE's data request, the University stated that applicants to the Department of Physics graduate programs follow the same application procedures set forth by the Graduate School. Both M.S. and Ph.D. applicants are required to submit an application, transcripts, letters of recommendation, and their GRE and TOEFL (for international applicants) scores. Applicants to the Department of Physics M.S. and Ph.D. programs must have a minimum undergraduate grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale for regular admission. Applicants must also present evidence of potential to do graduate work by having completed specified coursework; a grade point average in physics and math of at least 3.0 during the last two years; and courses in math through vector calculus and partial differential equations are required.¹ In addition to the GRE, prospective students are required to have taken the Advanced Physics Examinations before applying for admission. The University did not state, nor did DOE find on the University's website, whether a threshold GRE score must be obtained to be considered for admission to one of its graduate physics programs.

According to the Graduate School's policies, once an applicant submits an application, a file is created containing support materials such as reference letters, test scores, transcripts, and other information. When the package is complete, information is reviewed by the prospective department, in this case, the physics department. The head of the physics department and a departmental graduate committee evaluate the applications. Factors considered and discussed in the evaluation are scholastic record, professional experience, letters of recommendation, statement of purpose, resumes, and "as appropriate"² scores on standardized tests. According to the University, the purpose of the discussions is to facilitate matches with applicant goals and what the VT research program can provide. Recommendations on which applicants to offer admission are then forwarded to the Graduate School for consideration. The Graduate School makes the final decision on which applicants it will extend an offer of admission. Although the application requests applicants to identify their sex, none of the faculty and administrators interviewed as a part of the review indicated that an applicant's sex is a factor considered when determining whether to extend an offer of admission.

¹ Students who lack some of the prerequisite courses may be considered for admission, but are required to remedy the deficiencies during their first year of graduate study.

² Neither the Graduate School, nor the Department of Physics have listed a minimum GRE score that must be obtained in order to be considered for admission to a graduate physics program.

B. Ranking Applicants and Numerical Limitations on the Admission of Applicants to Graduate Physics Programs

The University states that applicants to the Department of Physics graduate programs are not ranked in the admission process.

According to the University, the Department of Physics' numerical limitations are dictated by the number of assistantships that are available for any given semester,³ and additional assistantship support from the college is based on undergraduate enrollment. The department supports continuing students making progress toward their degree. It estimates the number of students that might continue on external support (research grant renewal) and the chances of continuation, and combines that information with the number of graduate assistantships it can expect from the College of Science, in order to make offers to new students.

C. Admissions Statistics

Appendices A and B provide the number and percentage of male and female students who applied, who were admitted, and who enrolled, either full-time or part-time, in the University's graduate physics programs for AY 2007-2008 through AY 2011-2012. Appendix A is a gender-related analysis of annual applications, admissions, and enrollment. Appendix B is a gender-related analysis of applications, admissions, and enrollment for the entire five-year period under review. Of particular interest to DOE was whether there was a disparity in the ratio of male and female student applicants and male and female applicants who were admitted.

Although the review showed no evidence of disparate treatment in the admissions process, an examination of Appendices A and B shows a few instances in which one sex was admitted to the Ph.D. program at a significantly⁴ higher rate than the other sex. (The number of students who applied, were admitted; and enrolled into the M.S. program is extremely small; thus, no conclusions can be drawn for that program.) For instance, as shown in Appendix A, the admission statistics for the Ph.D. program show that in three of the five years reviewed, the difference in the percentage of male and female applicants who were admitted was over 10%. For AY 2007-2008, 65 males applied for admission, and 44 (68%) of the males who applied were admitted. For the same AY, 10 females applied for admission, and 5 (50%) were admitted. Thus, the male admission rate was 18% higher than the female admission rate for AY 2007-2008. In addition, for AY 2010-2011, the male admission rate was 15% higher than the female admission rate. However, a review of the annual admission rates shows that male applicants were not always admitted at a higher rate than female applicants. For instance, the Ph.D. admission statistics show that in AY 2009-2010, the female admission rate was 17% higher than the male admission rate.

³ The University stated that its base allotment is small; 26 graduate teaching assistantships.

⁴ 10 percent or more.

To obtain a broader picture of whether there was a disparity in the ratio of male and female students who applied and were admitted to VT's physics Ph.D. program, DOE analyzed the admission statistics of the entire five-year period covered in the review.⁵ DOE notes that over the five-year period reviewed, the difference in the admission rates between male and female applicants to the Ph.D. program was only 5%.

D. Student Evaluation of the Admissions Process

A majority of the students who were interviewed described the admissions process as a "standard process." It involves completing an application form and submitting test scores, a letter of interest or a statement of purpose, and letters of recommendation. Most of the students who were interviewed said they did not believe anything in their admission experience was unfair.

Finding

Although the review showed no evidence of disparate treatment in the admissions process, an examination of Appendix A shows a few AYs in which one sex was admitted to VT's physics Ph.D. program at a significantly higher rate than the other sex. However, when evaluating the entire five-year period covered in the review, the statistics show only a small variance between the percentage of male and female applicants who were admitted to the Ph.D. program (5%). The application and admissions processes for VT's graduate physics programs are facially neutral, and there is no evidence to suggest that an applicant's sex is a factor considered when determining whether to extend an offer of admission. Based on the information above, DOE concludes that VT's graduate physics admissions processes and procedures are in compliance with Title IX and DOE implementing regulations.

V. Time Limit for Degree Completion, Leaves of Absence, Readmission, and Retention

The Department of Physics graduate programs follow the Graduate School's policies and procedures for graduate students who wish to take a leave of absence, and for students requesting readmission. Graduate students must be registered continuously at VT during the fall and spring semesters, unless on an approved leave of absence.

A. Time Limit for Degree Completion and Extension of Time

The time limit for degree completion is measured from the semester in which the first course is applied to the degree. The Department of Physics Graduate Student Handbook states that, "[r]equirements vary somewhat, but the expectation is that the M.S. should be completed in two years and that the Ph.D. will require an average of five to six years." The review uncovered no set time limit for completing either degree. However, according to the Graduate Catalog, students in both the M.S. and Ph.D. programs are

⁵ As noted above, the number of students who applied, who were admitted, and who enrolled in the M.S. program was too small to draw any conclusions.

required to submit a Plan of Study and undergo an annual academic review for the purpose of evaluating a student's satisfactory progress toward a graduate degree.

B. Leave of Absence

The Department of Physics and the Graduate School realize that students sometimes experience situations in which they cannot be continuously enrolled and may need to request a leave of absence (LOA). Students who desire a LOA must submit a Request for Leave of Absence form two weeks before the beginning of the semester for which the leave is requested. The LOA must be approved by the student's advisor and the Department Head or Graduate Program Director for the department before submission to the Graduate School. If a graduate Dean approves the leave, the continuous enrollment requirement is relaxed during the period of leave. The LOA form indicates the time when the student will return to the program and any conditions the department or the Graduate School may stipulate for the student's readmission within that time.

C. Application for Readmission

When a student has not been registered for more than one calendar year, an Application for Readmission is required, whether or not the student has been on a formal LOA. The readmission process requires a review of the student's progress and of the Plan of Study to determine what changes, justification of old course work, committee changes, or other conditions may be required for readmission to the degree.

D. Exceptions to Policies

The Graduate Catalog states that exceptions to policies may be requested of the Dean's Office of the Graduate School. Requests should come from the graduate student's advisor, cite the policy, justify the request, and demonstrate appropriate departmental support.

E. Readmission Statistics

Over the five-year period under review, two male students requested, and were granted, readmission.

F. Retention

According to the University's records, 10 male students and two female students dropped out of the graduate physics program during the five-year period under review. Eight of the males were Ph.D. students and two were M.S. students. The two female students were both in the Ph.D. program. The physics department tracks both the sex of the student and the reason cited by students when leaving a graduate program. According to their records, reasons cited for non-completion were: career changes, a death in the family, marriage in another state, transfer to a different degree, and a change of mind. One student did not satisfy the conditions required to continue his studies.

One of the students interviewed stated that his wife was in the graduate physics program, but dropped out after her first year. The student stated that he and his wife have a child, and that the wait for University child care was long and the cost was too expensive. Information provided by the University does not show the withdrawal of this student's wife.

Finding

DOE finds no evidence of gender disparity insofar as it concerns the Graduate School's and physics department's policies and procedures related to time limits imposed for degree completion, requests for leaves of absence, requests for readmission, and requests for exceptions. Therefore, we find VT's physics department and Graduate School are in compliance with Title IX and DOE implementing regulations in this regard.

VI. Financial Assistance

According to VT's Department of Physics, graduate students entering the physics program may be granted support upon admission, which is typically in the form of a graduate assistantship/teaching assistantship appointment from the department. After a student passes the Preliminary Examination, he/she is often supported by a research assistantship from the advisor's research group. In extraordinary cases, a research group may offer a research assistantship from the beginning.

A. Graduate Assistantships and Graduate Teaching Assistantships

As noted above, incoming graduate students may be awarded a graduate assistantship (GA) or a graduate teaching assistantship (GTA) by the physics department. GA/GTA assignments are made by the Department of Physics Associate Chair, in consultation with the Department Chair. GAs provide academic and program support to faculty or departments. GA responsibilities may consist of duties unrelated directly to teaching or research, and may also include grading examinations and preparing or maintaining lab equipment. GTA duties include the same responsibilities as GAs, but may also include teaching labs or undergraduate courses. Faculty members in charge of specific GTAs conduct performance evaluations on GTAs each semester, and present the evaluations to the Graduate Committee and the Department Chair.

B. Research Assistantships

A research assistantship (RA) is supported by individual faculty members or research groups, and is usually offered to students that have passed the Preliminary Examinations.

According to the University, incoming graduate students have a chance to become familiar with research projects and research groups at weekly informal seminars, which are conducted by faculty in the physics department. Those interviewed stated that in order to obtain a RA, the student usually initiates contact with a faculty member involved

in a particular research project to indicate his or her interest. None of the subjects interviewed felt that a student's gender played a role in the selection of a research assistantship.

C. Other Forms of Financial Support

Graduate physics students may also receive financial assistance in the form of scholarships, fellowships, and awards. DOE reviewed information provided by the University concerning the types of awards that are available to graduate students, along with a description of the selection criteria, and award nomination forms.

Finding

DOE found no evidence suggesting gender-disparity in awarding financial assistance to graduate students in the selection process for GA, GTA, or RA positions, or in the award of scholarships, fellowships, academic or achievement awards. Based on the information above, DOE concludes that the University is in compliance with Title IX and DOE implementing regulations.

VII. Steps to Completion of a Graduate Degree in Physics

All graduate students must submit a Plan of Study that meets at least the minimum Graduate School requirements for the designated degree. The Plan of Study must be approved by the student's Advisor and Advisory Committee, the Graduate Program Director or Department Head, and the Graduate School for approval.

The student's Advisory Committee works with the student to design a Plan of Study, provide advice, conduct required examinations, and assess the student's progress and accomplishments. Advisory Committee members are appointed by the Graduate School on recommendation by the Department Head or Graduate Program Director.

Master's students must have an advisory committee of at least three faculty members with a master's degree or higher. Ph.D. students must have an advisory committee of at least four faculty members with a doctoral degree.

Graduate Advisors, who are the Chairs of the Advisory Committees, must be teaching/research faculty with tenure. Exceptions to the tenure requirement may be made, and are listed in the Graduate Catalog.

A. Master's Degree

The M.S. program has two options: non-thesis and thesis. For the non-thesis option, only course work is required. For the thesis option, in addition to course work, students are required to conduct 6-10 hours of research toward a thesis. A thesis represents a written communication of the original research findings.

In addition to required course work, each student must pass a final oral examination in front of the student's Advisory Committee. Students in the non-thesis program must answer questions in the core areas of physics at the advanced undergraduate level. Students who completed a thesis are expected to give an oral defense of their research.

B. Ph.D. Degree

In addition to course work, Ph.D. students are required to successfully complete two pre-defense exams, as well as a dissertation and final examination. The pre-defense examinations consist of two parts: (1) the qualifying exam, which is an examination on general physics at the upper undergraduate level; and (2) the preliminary exam, which consists of a presentation of and examination on the background material and preliminary research the student has performed.

1. Pre-Defense Examinations

Students are expected to perform satisfactorily on both the qualifying and preliminary examinations, in order to be allowed to proceed toward a Ph.D. If a student fails one of the examinations, but passes the other, only the failed examination needs to be re-administered.

Students are required to attempt the qualifying examination by the end of their third semester in the program, and the preliminary examination no later than by the end of their fifth semester. These time limits can be extended by the graduate committee if good cause is demonstrated. If a student fails the first attempt at the qualifying examination, he/she is allowed a second attempt. If a student fails the preliminary examination, one full semester must elapse before the second attempt is scheduled. If a student fails his/her second attempt at either the qualifying or preliminary examination, he/she will not be permitted to continue toward a Ph.D., but may remain in the program to obtain an M.S. degree in physics.

In addition, students must pass the qualifying examination no later than the end of their second academic year in the Ph.D. program, and the preliminary examination by the end of their third year. If a student fails to meet these time limits, he/she will not be allowed to continue toward a Ph.D., but may remain in the program to obtain an M.S. degree in physics. These time limits can be extended, at the discretion of the Graduate Committee, but only if the extension is granted before the time limits have expired, and extenuating circumstances exist beyond the student's control.

The qualifying and preliminary exams are usually administered on the same day by the student's Advisory Committee. However, the primary research advisor will not take part in administering or evaluating the qualifying exam. The qualifying examination usually lasts about 1.5 hours, and its purpose is to evaluate the student's understanding of the basics that are necessary to successfully move forward and continue in the Ph.D. program. At the end of the examination, the student steps out of the room, and the committee discusses the performance. The student is called back into the room, informed

of his/her performance, and given guidance on how to proceed if he/she did not perform successfully on the examination.

2. Doctoral Dissertation and Defense

A dissertation based on original investigation and supervised by a member (or members) of the student's Advisory Committee is required. The dissertation must show mastery of a special field, capacity for independent research, and a scholarly result. After satisfactorily meeting all other requirements and after the research and writing of the dissertation are substantially complete, the Ph.D. candidate must pass a final oral examination. The final examination is administered by the student's Advisory Committee, and consists of an oral defense of the student's dissertation.

To pass any of the examinations required above, a graduate student is allowed, at most, one unsatisfactory vote.

3. Qualifying Examination Pass/Fail Rates

Data provided by the University shows that, during the period under review, only two male Ph.D. students failed the qualifying examination.

4. Dissertation Pass/Fail Rates

Data provided by the University shows that, during the period under review, four male Ph.D. students and one female Ph.D. student failed the dissertation requirements.

Finding

DOE reviewed the policies, procedures, and grading methods related to the physics department's qualifying examination, preliminary examination, and dissertation defense requirements, and found no evidence of bias or gender-disparity in the manner in which the examinations were administered or graded. Nor did DOE find evidence of gender-disparity in the pass rates of male and female test-takers.

Prior to the review, the Graduate Catalog and the Department of Physics Student Handbook stated that extensions for taking the preliminary and qualifying examinations may be granted at the discretion of the Graduate Committee, but only if the extension was granted before the time limits have expired, *and extenuating circumstances exist beyond the student's control*. DOE noted that the policy might affect a student who requests an extension due to the birth or adoption of a child, the timing of which is presumably within a student's control. Although facially neutral, such a policy could have a disproportionate adverse impact upon female graduate students who are typically pursuing their degree during their child-bearing years. VT responded to this concern by clarifying that the Graduate School considers circumstances such as pregnancy and childbirth when it responds to requests for extensions, and would review its publications.

Furthermore, the Department of Physics has updated its Graduate Student handbook, including the on-line version of the handbook, which includes the following statement:

These time limits can be extended by the graduate committee if good cause is demonstrated. Examples of reasons to extend time limits include: debilitating medical conditions; medical conditions that require hospitalization; the birth of a child; and, data loss caused by mechanical failure. The committee will consider each student request on a case-by-case basis.

VIII. The Environment

A. B. Gender Bias/Sexual Harassment

Most of the students who were interviewed stated that gender bias did not affect any aspect of their studies. It was their observation that the dynamics among students, and between professors and students, was positive. Faculty members made similar statements. Most of the students interviewed also stated that they had little or no occasion to interact with their program Chair, but felt that the Chair would be accessible if the need arose. In addition, a majority of the students interviewed said they had not observed or heard of any case of sexual harassment or gender bias.

However, one of the students interviewed stated that a female professor told two female undergraduate students that they were not smart enough to study physics. The student stated that the female students then dropped physics, and one went from a BS to a BA degree. We note that the statements were alleged to have been made to two undergraduate students; the professor who was alleged to have made the statements taught graduate level courses; and, the allegation is uncorroborated.

C. Campus Safety

Interview subjects were asked about campus safety features because it is believed that females are more often the victims of campus violence than males. The intent of DOE is to determine whether campus safety features offer the same protection for females as they afford males. Those interviewed stated that they felt the campus was safe. Nevertheless, most of the students interviewed informed DOE of several safety measures taken by the University, and stated that they used the public safety services offered by the University.

D. Child Care

On-campus child care is available to students. Students with children were interviewed, but none stated that they used campus child care. One of the students informed DOE that the waitlist was long, that tuition was too expensive, and that as a result, the student's spouse, who was also a graduate physics student at one time, ended up dropping out of the program.

Finding

The majority of those interviewed stated that they had not been subjected to, nor witnessed, discrimination based on sex or sexual harassment within the graduate physics programs.

IX. Title IX Coordinator, Non-Discrimination Policy, and Title IX Grievance Procedures

Title IX requires each recipient of Federal financial assistance to notify its students and employees of the name, office address, and telephone number of the employee or employees appointed to coordinate and administer its Title IX grievance process. This information should be disseminated through newspapers and magazines operated by the recipient, and by memoranda or other written communication distributed to each student and employee.

In addition, DOE implementing regulations require a recipient to prominently include a statement of its policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of sex in each announcement, catalog, or application form that it makes available to students and employees or which is otherwise used in connection with the recruitment of students and employees. 10 C.F.R. Section 1042.135 to 140.

Recipients are also required to adopt and publish grievance procedures providing for the prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee complaints that allege actions prohibited by Title IX. 10 C.F.R. Section 1042.140(b). The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) recommends that grievance procedures include both an informal and a formal process, and also provide complainants with information on their right to file a discrimination complaint with an appropriate Federal agency, if there is no satisfactory resolution of the complaint.⁶

A. The Title IX Coordinator

The Compliance and Conflict Resolution office (CCR) is identified by the University as the office responsible for performing Title IX compliance functions. CCR is located within the University's Office of Equity and Access, which is a division of the University's Department of Human Resources. CCR is headed by the Director and Title IX Coordinator, Pamela White. The Director and Title IX Coordinator during the period under review was Maggie Sloane.

B. Notice of Title IX Coordinator, Title IX Requirements, and Right to File a Title IX Complaint

In addition to conducting interviews with students, faculty, and administrators, DOE reviewed the University's website, announcements, catalogs, and applications to

⁶ See *Title IX Legal Manual*, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, (Jan. 11, 2001).

determine whether the Department of Physics and/or CCR has notified applicants, students, and employees of its Title IX policies concerning non-discrimination on the basis of sex. DOE also reviewed whether applicants, students, and employees have been informed of the Title IX Coordinator's identity and how to file a complaint.

A review of information provided by the University and information gained through DOE's independent research shows that VT consistently informs applicants, students, and employees of its Title IX non-discrimination policy. The University's homepage includes a prominent link entitled "Equal Opportunity". Clicking on the link brings the reader to a quick summary of the University's non-discrimination policies, and lists VT's Human Resources office as the main point of contact for questions related to its non-discrimination policies. However, at the time that the on-site review was conducted, the identity and contact information of VT's Title IX Coordinator is not included there.

Within the Equal Opportunity webpage, the reader may click on another link, which brings him/her to Policy 1025, "Anti-Discrimination and Prevention Policy." Policy 1025 provides a detailed explanation of the University's non-discrimination policies and procedures. In addition, it describes the responsibilities of those experiencing discrimination, along with the responsibilities of administrators, supervisors, and faculty. Policy 1025 explains the offices that are responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of discrimination and sexual harassment, and also describes the complaint process, deadlines, and avenues for resolution of such complaints. The identity and contact information for the Title IX Coordinator was not included at this link during the time that the onsite review was conducted.

A quick search on VT's website for keyword, "discrimination," brings the reader to several links; the first link is to VT's webpage for "Harassment and Discrimination General Information." As with the Equal Opportunity webpage, this webpage also informs the reader of VT's harassment and non-discrimination policies. In addition, this webpage provides links to definitions of harassment and discrimination, available trainings, resource guides on what to do if you feel you are being subjected to discrimination or sexually harassed, and how to handle receipt of a complaint, an explanation of how to file a complaint, and a description of the complaint process. Last but not least, this webpage identifies Title IX, posts another link to the University's Policy 1025, and identifies the Director for CCR. Again, it did not identify the Director as the University's Title IX Coordinator.

DOE noticed that neither the Graduate School's nor the Department of Physics web pages post the University's non-discrimination policies. However, the University's non-discrimination statement can be found within the Department of Physics Graduate Student Handbook, which is posted on the Department of Physics webpage.

VT's application for admission to Graduate School is an online process. A copy of the application process provided by the University shows that the application has a non-discrimination policy located toward the end of the process.

According to the University, in addition to posting notice of its Title IX non-discrimination and sexual harassment policies, the University offers training seminars on the subjects to the entire University community. The Office for Diversity and Inclusion conducts diversity training, which is available to faculty, staff, and those with teaching responsibilities. A portion of this training is dedicated to sexual harassment, discrimination, and complaint handling. This training is discussed in greater depth in the Sexual Harassment portion of this report. The University, through CCR, also conducts multiple trainings on Title VII and Title IX for students, staff, faculty, and administrators. In fact, from January to April 2012, CCR conducted 45 training seminars for over 1,000 people.

Most of the faculty was aware of Title IX and the identity of VT's Title IX Coordinator. About half of the students interviewed were knowledgeable of Title IX as it relates to academics, and the identity and/or existence of VT's Title IX Coordinator.

C. Title IX Complaint Procedures

As previously cited, VT's Human Resources department has a webpage entitled, "Harassment and Discrimination." This webpage contains a vast array of links that provide information about sexual harassment and discrimination. The webpage also provides a plethora of information on how to make informal and formal complaints of sexual harassment and discrimination, what the complaint process entails, guidance on how to handle sexual harassment or discrimination or the receipt of such complaints, and a link to VT's Policy 1025. Finally, the webpage provides links on how to file discrimination and/or sexual harassment complaints with particular state and federal agencies.

1. Who May File a Complaint?

VT has developed procedures for internal resolution of discrimination and harassment complaints that arise within the University community. These procedures apply to acts of discrimination and/or harassment performed by any employee, volunteer, vendor, or contractor of VT. Any student, faculty, or staff member who believes he or she has been discriminated against or harassed by an employee, volunteer, vendor, or contractor of VT, may file a complaint with CCR.

Discrimination and/or harassment allegedly perpetrated by a student who is not acting in the capacity of a University employee, volunteer, vendor or contractor, falls within the jurisdiction of the Office of Student Conduct regardless of the status of the complainant (i.e., student, faculty, or staff).

2. Responsibilities of Administrators, Supervisors, and Faculty

According to VT's Policy 1025, if an administrator, supervisor, or individual with instructional responsibility becomes aware of an incident that might reasonably be construed as constituting discrimination and/or harassment, he or she must take

immediate steps to address the matter. In such cases, the administrator, supervisor, or individual with instructional responsibility is required to promptly contact the Department of Human Resources. Administrators, supervisors, and those with instructional responsibility are required to act whenever they learn, either directly or indirectly, about discrimination and/or harassment, even if the complainant requests that no action be taken.

Administrators, supervisors, and those with instructional responsibility are responsible for protecting a complainant from continued discrimination, harassment, or retaliation. They must also protect persons accused of discrimination and/or harassment from potential damage by false allegations. VT holds administrators and supervisors accountable for dealing with and taking steps to prevent discrimination and/or harassment. VT also holds administrators and supervisors responsible for informing their employees and students of its non-discrimination and harassment policies.

3. Complaint and Investigation Procedures

a. Informal Resolution

Once CCR and/or the Department of Human Resources receives information suggesting a reasonable possibility that discrimination and/or harassment has occurred, it arranges a meeting with the complainant in order to further review the information, the applicability of Policy 1025, and options available to the complainant for resolution. Individuals who do not wish to file a formal complaint, but who nevertheless wish to put an end to conduct they believe violates Policy 1025, may pursue the following informal resolution measures:

- A complainant may request the advice and assistance of the director for CCR to write to or meet with the respondent, discuss the situation, and make it clear that the behavior is unwelcome; or
- The Director for CCR may discuss the alleged conduct with the charged party. A complainant may request that, if practical, such a conversation be held without revealing his or her identity directly to the charged party. Action taken by the director for compliance under this provision does not constitute a finding of discrimination and/or harassment.
- If both parties are willing to do so, they may use VT's mediation program, administered by VT's Human Resources, to assist them in discussing the matter and resolving issues in a manner agreed to by both.
- The Director for CCR can consult with appropriate supervisors to explore options for informal resolution, including training and education.

b. CCR Initiated Investigation or Departmental Request for Investigation

The Director for CCR may initiate an investigation upon referral of a significant concern by another department, or upon learning of a possible violation. CCR immediately notifies the appropriate administrator of the relevant area about an investigation, unless the administrator is the respondent. The respondent is also notified as soon as possible, taking into consideration any investigative needs involved in addressing the situation. The respondent is also informed of the outcome of any investigation.

c. Individual Formal Complaint and Investigation Procedures

An individual may file a formal complaint of harassment and/or discrimination by completing and signing a Formal Complaint Form, and submitting it to the Director for CCR. Individuals wishing to file a formal complaint must do so within 300 calendar days of the last incident of alleged discrimination and/or harassment.

Within ten business days after a written complaint is filed, the Director for CCR is required to provide written notification to the respondent of the allegations and the identity of the complainant. The respondent is furnished with a copy of the written charge, and has an opportunity to respond to the allegations. The respondent's immediate supervisor also receives a copy of the written notification. After the notification described above, the Director for CCR conducts the investigation.

Following an investigation, the Director for CCR issues a finding of whether there has been a violation of Policy 1025. In the case of an individual formal complaint, the complainant is informed of the completion of the investigation as well as the findings, and the respondent and the appropriate administrators receive a report outlining the findings and the basis for those conclusions.

The decision to impose discipline or corrective action is the responsibility of relevant administrators. If discipline is imposed, the severity and pervasiveness of the conduct, the apparent intent of the respondent, and other relevant factors in the case are taken into consideration. Proposed disciplinary action(s) imposed must be in accordance with policies and procedures in the relevant faculty or staff handbooks.

A complainant found to have intentionally made false allegations of discrimination and/or harassment is subject to University discipline.

b. Appeals

Disciplinary action imposed as a result of a finding of discrimination and/or harassment may be appealed in accordance with policies in the relevant faculty or staff handbooks.

4. Alternative Avenues for Filing Formal Complaints

Policy 1025 informs individuals that in addition to, or in lieu of, the procedures set forth above, one may pursue remedies through the following avenues of redress:

- Students may file formal complaints with the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education.
- Faculty members may file a charge with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and/or the Virginia Council on Human Rights within 300 days of the incident.
- Non-probationary staff may file a grievance within 30 days of the offense as outlined in the Grievance Procedure for State Employees.
- Salaried and wage staff may file a complaint using the Discrimination Complaint Procedure administered by the Office of Equal Employment Services in the state's Department of Human Resource Management.
- Salaried and wage staff may file a complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or the Virginia Council on Human Rights within 300 days of the alleged discrimination/harassment.
- Additional assistance and support may be obtained from the Women's Center, the Office of the Provost (faculty), the Department of Human Resources (staff and AP faculty), the Graduate School (graduate students), the Dean of Students Office, Cook Counseling Center, or the Office of Student Conduct (students).

Finding

Based on information provided by the University, and on information published on the University's website, we find that the school has met the basic Title IX requirement of prominently including a statement of its policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of sex in each announcement, catalog, or application form that it makes available to students and employees or which is otherwise used in connection with the recruitment of students and employees.

DOE recognizes that the University has taken great initiative in conducting Title IX related training for the University community, which is conducted by the Title IX Coordinator. DOE also recognizes that the University has published the identity and contact information of the Director for CCR on the web pages and documents mentioned above; however, at the time that the on-site review was conducted, those publications did not identify the Director as the University's Title IX Coordinator. Title IX requires that the University publish, in written format, the identity and contact information of VT's Title IX Coordinator. The Office of Equity and Access/CCR has since informed DOE

that its webpages have been updated to identify the Director for CCR as VT's Title IX Coordinator and to provide contact information. The Director assures DOE that the information will be included in all recruitment publications.

DOE finds that VT has met Title IX's basic requirements for adopting and publishing procedures that provide for the prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee complaints that allege actions prohibited by Title IX. Prior to the review, the University had not fully established deadlines within the grievance and investigation process, which could be critical to ensuring that investigations and findings are completed in a timely manner. DOE notes that the University has since established deadlines and modified its processes for notifying respondents of allegations and ensuing investigation. VT has added the requirement that investigations in student-related complaints be completed within 60 calendar days. Furthermore, CCR will notify the complainant and the respondent, in writing, of any probable delay within ten (10) days prior to the sixty (60) day deadline. This information has also been added to VT's website.

DOE notes that Policy 1025 does not have a process available to either the complainant or the respondent for disputing an investigation's findings. It appears that the only appealable issue under Policy 1025 is disciplinary measures. The Director for CCR has recently informed DOE that the Office of the University Legal Counsel is now reviewing Policy 1025 with respect to the appealable issues.

Recommendation

DOE recommends that the University develop an appeals policy and procedure for disputing investigative findings.

X. Sexual Harassment and Sex Discrimination Policies

As previously noted, DOE regulations implementing Title IX, at 10 C.F.R. Part 1042, require that recipients adopt policies against sex discrimination in their programs and activities. DOE implementing regulations also require that recipients develop procedures that provide a mechanism for discovering sexual harassment and sex discrimination as early as possible, and for effectively correcting problems of sexual harassment and sex discrimination.

A. Sexual Harassment Policy

The University has an established policy against sexual harassment, as well as grievance procedures, which are generally published in the same avenues and manner as the University's non-discrimination policies and statements, described above.

B. Preventive Measures

In addition to establishing its sexual harassment policy and complaint procedures, VT has developed sexual harassment preventive measures. Although VT does not have a

mandatory sexual harassment training policy for students and faculty, its practice is to provide workshops on harassment prevention and complaint handling on a regular basis. Diversity training is available throughout the year to faculty, staff, and those with teaching responsibilities, and includes core classes such as, "Creating and Maintaining a Respectful Workplace," and "Harassment Prevention and Complaint Handling." The University stated that these courses have also been tailored for specific departments and offered to students and faculty, including those in the physics department.

In addition to these trainings, in 2011, the Women's Center at VT provided 81 presentations related to sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking to over 2,400 people within the University community.

Most of the faculty and about half of the students interviewed as part of this review confirmed they had received sexual harassment training. None of the witnesses interviewed were aware of any incidents of sexual harassment.

Finding

The policies, procedures, and practices adopted by the University for discouraging sexual harassment and for processing complaints of sexual harassments are within the standards established by Title IX and DOE implementing regulations. We commend VT for the frequency of sexual harassment and assault training it conducts and the number of individuals its efforts to prevent sexual harassment and assault have reached.

XI. Conclusion and Recommendations

DOE finds that VT's Department of Physics graduate programs have met the basic requirements of Title IX and DOE's implementing regulations. The compliance review did not uncover any evidence of discrimination in the implementation of the University's outreach and recruitment, admissions, and financial assistance policies. There is also no evidence that the campus climate or other circumstances hinder or exclude Physics students in the programs or activities offered by VT.

DOE has identified in this report some policies and procedures which were needed to improve the University's Title IX compliance efforts. DOE acknowledges that VT has taken steps since the on-site visit to review, clarify, and publish its policies relating to extensions for taking the preliminary and qualifying examinations. VT has specified circumstances that are considered "beyond the student's control" to alleviate the potential disproportionate adverse impact on female students, and the Graduate Student Handbook has been updated. VT has also taken action to update its publications and on-line content to include the identity of the Title IX Coordinator and contact information, and has established deadlines for its investigations and complaints process.

DOE recommends that the University develop an appeals policy and procedure for disputing investigative findings.

The Department commends the Department of Physics and the Graduate School on its outreach efforts to attract students to the STEM fields of study through numerous programs which have been made widely available. Students and faculty have high visibility and engagement with the surrounding community, and provide classes, lectures, and demonstrations to many in the community. VT's outreach can be considered a model for other universities to follow.